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GUEST: **Guido BERTUCCI**
Director, Division of Public Administration and Development Management
UN Department for Development Support and Management Services

JOURNALISTS: Ian Steele, Press Foundation of Asia
Norberto Svarzman, Televisa (Mexico City)

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Guido BERTUCCI, Director of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management of the UN Department for Development Support and Management Services, describes the role the world community plays in assisting many developing countries to improve their management and financial systems. For the last 50 years, United Nations priorities have been in areas such as peace-keeping, human rights, refugees, conflict resolution, the environment and population; only recently has the UN system given specific attention to public administration and development management. According to Mr. Bertucci, the international community renders its assistance without interfering in the internal affairs of recipient countries.

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Director: Ivan Stoynov
Production Assistant: Ellen McGuffie

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Since the establishment of the modern nation-State, public administration has been the tool of government. And during the last few years, many governments have intensified their efforts for sustainable economic growth and development. But for many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, this would be difficult to achieve without international support. How can the world community assist these nations to improve their administrative and financial management systems?

Our guest today, Guido Bertucci, is from the UN Department for Development Support and Management Services, where he is Director of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management. Joining me to talk with Mr. Bertucci are Ian Steele of the Press Foundation of Asia and Norberto Svarzman of Televisa, of Mexico City.

Mr. Bertucci, welcome to World Chronicle.

BERTUCCI: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Director, I've been reading a report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the subject we're about to discuss, and I notice that he says that "Diverse national circumstances have, for many governments, generated a condition of permanent crisis management in the public sector and a need to establish a framework for stable and sustainable human development." What is he referring to when he talks about "a permanent crisis management" situation?

BERTUCCI: Yes. Well, in the past 50 years, I would say, the developments which have taken place in the world have been so rapid, both in terms of technology and in terms of interdependence, etc., etc., and our governments have — they were devised last century to deal with a specific historic situation, and they are grappling with this sudden pace of world development. The situation in certain countries is less critical, such developed countries, since they have already a very strong basis which they can build upon. For other countries, developing countries, they are trying to enter into the development phase and, at the same time, trying to catch up with the advances, and therefore they are really in a situation of permanent crisis. They are trying to deal with issues which are too big for them to deal with in isolation.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, what can the United Nations do to help them overcome these problems?

BERTUCCI: In the past, the United Nations has been very active in development assistance. It has given resources to build bridges, infrastructure, to deal with problems of energy, etc., etc. But the UN has not addressed the issues of the tools for development. The tools for development are a good working government, a good working public administration which can produce results. Unless we tackle these needs, we will not be able to help developing countries to deal with other issues, such as population, energy, sustainable development.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is the United Nations taking on the role of a sort of international big brother in this endeavour?

BERTUCCI: Well, I wouldn't say so, because, in a sense, ultimately the choice in terms of form of government, public administration, remains with the country itself, because it's the result of historic cultural, religious and geographical circumstances.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you only provide technical assistance.

BERTUCCI: Technical assistance. We provide advice if and when required.

STEELE: Mr. Bertucci, wherever we look these days governments are under fire for mismanagement, incompetence, corruption. Is there such a thing as a role model for a developing country? We know what their inadequacies are, but it sounds a little like the pot calling the kettle black. Is anybody doing it right? And what is the framework for good government that the UN, which has its own peculiar problems at this time, can pass along?

BERTUCCI: Well, I agree with you, there is not really a role model or a standard. You know, sometimes there are certain countries who feel that, in view of the developed form of administration that they have, they can dictate to others. But we see these same governments suffer, as you mentioned, some major problems. So, although there is no role model, there are some, I would say, universal principles which now are emerging as characteristics of a well-functioning government.

STEELE: What would they be?

BERTUCCI: For example, a government which is transparent, namely, open to the scrutiny of the citizens; a government which has as its final objective to serve the citizens, not to take advantage of the citizens; a government which is lean, that does the most and spends the least; a government which is accountable; a government which incorporates in its procedures and processes other forces of civil societies, such as non-governmental associations, civic associations, community organizations, etc.

STEELE: Should these be pre-conditions for UN assistance?

BERTUCCI: I definitely couldn't call them pre-conditions in the sense that our role is exactly to help governments to become that way, to help governments to develop themselves in such a way as to conform to some of these characteristics. And therefore if we

put these pre-conditions, then actually we are cutting ourselves out of the deal. So I think –

STEELE: Well, the World Bank does, the International Monetary Fund does; they do have criteria for good management before putting their money into an open hole. And what about the rest of the UN system? There must be some structure within which you invest your money. What is the framework to protect the UN's money when it's delivered?

BERTUCCI: Well, actually, our philosophy – which I think now is shared more and more also by the World Bank – is to attach, not conditions, but certain collateral programmes or precursory programmes, in the sense that whenever we have a programme, for example, in energy, to ensure that there is a component of that programme which is aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity and the managerial capacity. So we kill two birds with one stone. The World Bank – for example, we have been having a lot of discussions, and we have been developing certain analyses of the capacity of a country. And now my understanding is that in many cases when the World Bank approves a loan for a specific project, either in energy, agriculture or health, they carry out a so-called capacity analysis. This capacity analysis reveals weaknesses in the government system, the public management system. They will be addressed as a component of the loan.

STEELE: So that the absorptive capacity is already in place; effectively, you know where the money is going, and somebody is going to –

BERTUCCI: Exactly. So we ensure – by ensuring that the component of the project, of the programme, of the loan, whatever, is aimed at guaranteeing certain managerial safeguards – that the money is properly used. So instead of using it as a conditionality, we use it in the positive sense that we assist the governments, the countries, to establish those systems if they are not in place.

SVARZMAN: Señor Bertucci, you mentioned that developing countries need an example of good administration, efficiency, openness. The UN itself is giving those examples? That's one question. Second: You mentioned the role of the World Bank. The other organizations, like UNDP, are following –

LITTLEJOHNS: The UN Development Programme.

SVARZMAN: Yes, – are following the same roles, or really are more an old-fashioned way, they just give the money and hope that things are okay?

BERTUCCI: Well, I will start from your last question. There is a mechanism which we have established – and which will be further strengthened in view of the debate taking place now in the UN General Assembly on public administration – to ensure that all the actors in this area have more or less the same approach. And, therefore, our Division – namely, part of the Secretariat of the UN; the United Nations Development Programme,

which deals with funding of projects within the UN; and the World Bank are working, for example, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, with the OECD* and other regional organizations, like the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, to ensure that there is a common approach. The UN itself in particular – since you mentioned the United Nations Development Programme – places a lot of emphasis on these issues of public management, and they highlight it as a priority in their assistance. So I would say that – or we cannot say that we are always 100 per cent sure that the money is properly placed, but at least we can be sure that we are setting up those mechanisms necessary to ensure that the money is properly used.

SVARZMAN: Going back to the first one.

BERTUCCI: Yes. The first question – I know you are very interested in the first question. [LAUGH] And it's not coincident – well, I'm happy that you mentioned it, because there was a meeting of experts in public administration which was in preparation for the session of the General Assembly on public administration, and they highlighted the link between what we call national governance, or national public management capacity, and the so-called global or international governance and public management capacity. There is no question that the UN, being an international bureaucracy, suffers from the same ills and the same problems that national governments suffer from. I think the UN finally is addressing this problem. And as a matter of fact, in connection with the resumed session of the General Assembly, we are going to arrange for an exchange of experiences among those actors at the national level, such as ministers or people who are involved in restructuring, re-engineering, and UN managers or UN diplomats who are dealing with this. Definitely the UN has a lot to learn from a number of experiences which have taken place around the world. The UN, as the Secretary-General said, must become more efficient, leaner, etc., etc. So I think this is the right opportunity for the UN to –

SVARZMAN: Well, so far, those are the statements. For example, a few days ago I was in Mexico City and I visited the big UN building there. You know how many offices of the different organizations are there? Twenty-one. Chiefs, second chiefs, secretaries, cars, etc., etc. I think it's a little bit too much, no?

BERTUCCI: I fully agree with you. And actually that's one that the Secretary-General has been – as you know, in the past couple of years he has put up some proposals to have unified offices of the UN at the country level. And I think this is the direction to go. Companies are streamlining, they are merging, they're consolidating; I think the UN should do exactly the same. My hope is that somehow this debate that is taking place in the

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*Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

UN on public administration will not be relegated to, "All right, let's help developing countries", but let's also ourselves learn from these types of experiences.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bertucci, you've spoken about the need for leaner governments, but of course governments are major sources of employment. And many countries, if they were to reduce their bureaucracies, would increase their unemployment problems. How do you reconcile those two situations?

BERTUCCI: This is one of the more serious problems encountered by the World Bank in the past, when they were promoting structural adjustment programmes, namely, programmes aimed at reducing the public expenditures. And of course these programmes, let's say the core of the programme was the major reduction of the public service. Now, this created very serious social problems, as you mentioned. So now the idea is really to have these programmes of structural adjustment or reduction of public expenditure with programmes which foster entrepreneurship, business, etc., etc. The need, therefore, is for the government to be able to retool, the country to retool, from public employment to private employment.

STEELE: What kind of services does the UN provide to the many countries that are in a more or less permanent state of crisis? The situation in Rwanda, many of the African countries coming out of civil war – they're in a more or less permanent state of crisis. What does the UN do to rebuild those structures? What can it do to rebuild those structures?

LITTLEJOHNS: Before you answer that, Mr. Bertucci.... This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Guido Bertucci, Director of the Division of Public Adminstration and Development Management of the UN Department for Development Support and Management Services.

STEELE: When you go into a country like Rwanda, devastated by the events of '94, what do you do to institute a mechanism that allows you to spend money?

BERTUCCI: Yes. We have various examples in some cases – and I think it has worked quite well, for example, in Cambodia – where the UN substituted itself for the governments for a certain period of time, like the so-called transitional authorities. And these, I would say, are the cases in which somehow the UN is able to work out the mechanism, put in place the procedures, the structures, etc., etc. In other cases where this is not possible, it's much more difficult. So we mount programmes of assistance. For example, our Division, together with the United Nations Development Programme, which is the funding agency of the UN, has programmes in Rwanda, first, for the rebuilding of the administrative structure, and for the rebuilding of the justice system, and we work in cooperation with the Government. We have a combination of outside experts; at the same

time, we want to rebuild the national capacity. And with a lot of difficulty, I have to say, but we are hopeful that this will work out.

STEELE: So, effectively, you import a bureaucracy, you put an international bureaucracy on the plane, you send it to Cambodia or Rwanda or some other place, and they run the government until such time as they're back up to speed?

BERTUCCI: In certain cases, yes. For example, in the case of Namibia and Cambodia this was the case. In other cases, like Rwanda, no. There is a local bureaucracy in place, and we support it and we supplement it where necessary. Same case, for example, in Haiti; we have a similar case in Haiti. We are assisting them to rebuild the functioning capacity of the Parliament, which has not functioned for many years, from the actual rehabilitation of the building where the Parliament meets, because there was not even a building to house the Parliament in Haiti, to the creation of appropriate procedures, and so on and so forth. So in this particular case, therefore, we are not replacing, we are just supplementing. And we are using not only UN experts, but we are taking advantage of all the capacity which exists in the world. For example, we are dealing in Haiti with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is, as you know, an old organization which has a lot of experience in running parliaments.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about a country like Somalia, where there is no government, there are no banks, there's no post office? What can you do there?

BERTUCCI: Well, in the case – actually, this is very interesting. We had a meeting recently in Rome in which these particular problems, most acute administrative problems, and problems of countries emerging or still in conflict were discussed. In these particular cases where there is no central government we try to reinforce and strengthen the so-called governing capacity of local communities, so to at least allow the local community to start working, to start providing for the basic needs. So in Somalia the UN is working already, although there is no central government, is providing assistance to local communities so they are able to provide at least basic services, so the basic infrastructure can work, so that the basic conditions for human type of existence are....

STEELE: You're in a very positive mode because you're able to say you're putting something together, you're doing something to make things better. I find myself wondering, 50 years after the founding of the UN system, whether in the absence of these things – because clearly you're in a catch-22 here, you're trying to help governments that, by definition, don't have the mechanisms which they need to spend your – invest your money wisely. I mean, what does this say after 50 years, that this review and this process is going on? Does it tell us that there's been a tremendous loss of resources, that the third world has been a money pit? What does it tell us about where we've been and where we're headed?

BERTUCCI: Well, I think when we are talking about governments and their capacities we are talking about almost a – in the case of a society where there are gaps, there are those who have, those who have not; there are those who are very capable; there are those who improve fast, those who don't. So I think at the level of the international community as a whole we have an example of countries which have emerged – I can mention countries in Asia, a country in Latin America – who have really made giant leaps towards development. And of course on the other end of the spectrum we have countries, particularly in Africa, who have been really almost at the same level, if not worse than, they were 50 years ago. So somehow the question is, have we wasted resources? I don't think we have. The problem, in my opinion, is to look at the mistakes that we have made. And that's why we stress so much this question of governance and public management capacity. And I think one of the mistakes which was made was that not enough attention was paid to the managerial capacity of a country to handle development, to handle the resources.

Just to give you an example, we have developed recently in our department an aid coordination and accountability framework, for which we have brought together a number of donors, including the World Bank and bilateral donors. And this type of framework is a framework which we are trying to apply at the country level. So that a certain country – for example, we had a good example in Uganda: every different donor was providing different conditions, putting different requirements. And this, instead of helping the Government to establish a system where they could properly manage the money, account for it, etc., etc., was actually confusing the Government. So now our goal is to simplify these requirements, unify those requirements, so that the Government will be better equipped to absorb the assistance and account for it.

SVARZMAN: Is there a unified philosophy here how to promote development with less bureaucracy? Because a lot of people around here – I don't want to make any names – come from countries who for years and years have been economically centralized, who think that bureaucracy is the next best thing to heaven, etc.

BERTUCCI: Well, the trend now is not to build a bureaucracy. Unfortunately, the international community – and not only the UN, we have to say, but also bilateral donors – has thought that, right, whenever we give some money we create some new office, we create.... Now the idea is for the donors to be the facilitators, and then let the actors within the country emerge; for example, to utilize more and more non-governmental organizations, community-based already-existing groups, without having to establish necessarily a UN office or a UN project, etc. So I think this is the trend.

SVARZMAN: At the beginning of the meeting you mentioned you were giving tools for development, but these same tools have not – shouldn't be the same, let's say, for Latin

America as for Africa or for some people in Asia. Do you have a clear distinction, or do you have just a rubber stamp for the programmes?

BERTUCCI: Well, what we hope we can work as is almost as a clearing house of experiences and of best practices, to which governments around the world can have access. And therefore they can pick and choose, as I said before. But the important thing is to have access. For example, just recently in a meeting we had in Africa some African country was very interested in knowing how, for example, Malaysia and others of the East Asian "tigers" were able to develop so fast. And so I think we don't have a rubber stamp, we do not have any recipe; but we strongly believe in information. That information is really the wealth that we can transmit to developing countries. Then they will have to adapt whatever information they receive to their own conditions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bertucci, as part of the peace process in the Middle East, a lot of interesting things are happening in Palestine. What are you doing to help the Palestinians set up a working government?

BERTUCCI: Together with the United Nations Development Programme, we are working on programmes to build basically the functioning, the administrative capacity of the Palestinian Authority. We believe that unless the Palestinian Authority can properly administer the territories – can raise taxes, pay for its own services, etc., etc. – then it will not be possible for the country to progress any further. I have somehow – I'm a little sorry that a number of governments do not attach – the donor governments – attach enough importance to this type of intervention. Of course, because of internal public relations considerations, it is easier to raise money or to provide funds when there is a crisis, when there is a medical problem, when the children are involved, etc., etc.; but this is taking care of the symptoms and not of the cause. And we strongly believe that unless a government is provided with a capacity to handle the problem itself, then the international community will have to continue all the time to provide emergency assistance. And I would say that the investment, which was made before, although it is an investment with all due risk – whenever you make an investment you have risk – I think the investment would pay off.

STEELE: There have been five world conferences since 1990 that have made recommendations for efficient and responsive public administrations. Has anything come of those recommendations? One in particular, from Beijing, the Fourth World Women's Conference in '95, pointed out that there was very little representation for women in government. And if we look around the world there's hardly a government – well, there isn't a government anywhere that's met the equality standard for women in public administration. Is there any leverage which the UN system has brought to bear effectively? And is there any constructive evidence that any of these recommendations, the gender

recommendation in particular, has been taken seriously or will translate into anything of meaning?

BERTUCCI: Well, I think it is a very slow process, especially talking about gender. What we are doing in particular is to set the condition, the initial condition, for women to be able, for example, to enter public life, because it is impossible to say, "All right, we should have more women in public life", when the women in the specific country don't have the tools to do so. So, for example, we organized recently some training courses on how women can become active in the political arena, in the planning process, and how they can establish pressure groups, how they can establish organizations which then, once the organizations – because women *per se* are not able to reach those positions unless they represent pressure groups. So we have been very active there. But I believe that, for many countries, it is going to be a long process.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bertucci, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

BERTUCCI: It was my pleasure.

LITTLEJOHNS: Our guest has been Guido Bertucci, Director of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management of the UN Department for Development Support and Management Services. He was interviewed by Ian Steele of the Press Foundation of Asia and Norberto Svarzman of Televisa, of Mexico City. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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